

Message Text

PAGE 01 GUATEM 05437 01 OF 02 022358Z

54

ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2591

INFO AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GUATEMALA 5437

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINS, PINT, GT

SUBJ: PRESIDENT LAUGERUD AT MID-TERM: PROMISES, PROMISES

SUMMARY: HALFWAY THROUGH PRESIDENT LAUGERUD'S TERM OF OFFICE, HE REMAINS THE DOMINANT POLITICAL FIGURE IN GUATEMALA, FIRMLY IN CONTROL OF GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE AND WITH CONTINUED STRONG SUPPORT IN THE MILITARY AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY. THE ECONOMY IS DOING WELL UNDER THE IMPULSE OF DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN RECONSTRUCTION SPENDING AND HIGH COFFEE PRICES, AND FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES ARE AT RECORD LEVELS. HOWEVER, LITTLE OF THIS PROSPERITY TRICKLES DOWN TO THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION, AND, DESPITE HIS USE OF PROGRESSIVE RHETORIC, A MORE OPEN AND TOLERANT POLITICAL STYLE, AND SOME SUCCESS IN REPRESSING RIGHT-WING TERRORISM AGAINST OPPOSITION GROUPS LAUGERUD REMAINS AN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONSERVATIVE WHO IS UNWILLING TO PAY THE POLITICAL PRICE INVOLVED IN CHALLENGING EVEN MORE CONSERVATIVE MILITARY AND BUSINESS LEADERS ON BEHALF OF CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 GUATEM 05437 01 OF 02 022358Z

ANY SIGNIFICANT REFORM. HE GAVE AWAY WHAT WAS PROBABLY HIS LAST CHANCE TO CREATE ANMPENING FOR CHANGE LAST

MONTH WHEN HE ORDERED A RETURN TO DEPENDENCE ON THE

RIGHTIST MLN PARTY IN CONGRESS, AFTER SPENDING OVER A YEAR CAREFULLY WEANING HIS ADMINISTRATION AWAY FROM THE MLN. LAUGERUD'S PRIORITIES FOR THE REMAINDER OF HIS TERM WILL PROBABLY BE (1) TO ENSURE A STABLE, PEACEFUL TRANSFER OF POWER TO ANY ARMY GENERAL OF HIS CHOICE IN THE 1978 ELECTIONS, (1) TO MAKE CREDITABLE PROGRESS IN EARTHQUAKE RECONSTRUCTION, AND (3) TO PRESERVE THE NATIONAL HONOR ON THE BELIZE QUESTION (THE LATTER A SUBJECT NOT DISCUSSED IN THIS REPORT). END SUMMARY.

1. "I WOULD NOT HVE YOU MEDDLE WITH SUCH ANCIENT RIGHTS OF MINE AS I HAVE RECEIVED FROM MY PREDECESSORS; SUCH THINGS I WOULD BE SORRY SHOULD THEY BE ACCOUNTED FOR GRIEVANCES. ALL NOVELTIES ARE DANGEROUS AND THEREFORE I WOULD LOATH TO BE QUARRELED IN MY ANCIENT RIGHTS AND POSSESSIONS; FOR THAT WERE TO JUDGE ME UNWORTHY OF THAT WHICH MY PREDECESSORS HAD LEFT ME." (KING JAMES I, 1610).

2. HALFWAY THROUGH HIS FOUR-YEAR TERM, PRESIDENT LAUGERUD CONTINUES TO DEMONSTRATE HIS ABILITY TO USE ALL THE CONSIDERABLE LEVERAGE OF PRESIDENTIAL POWER IN THIS PRESIDENCIALISTA COUNTRY TO DOMINATE AND CONTROL THE POLITICAL SYSTEM. THE ENDS FOR WHICH HE USES POWER ARE THE SAME AS HIS PREDECESSORS: TO MAINTAIN THE PRESIDENT'S DOMINANCE OF THE SYSTEM INTACT, TO MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO IN THE NATION AT LARGE, AND TO PASS THE REPUBLIC, PRESERVED IN AMBER, ON TO A SUCCESSOR OF HIS CHOOSING. LAUGERUD'S METHODS ARE LESS HARSH AND HIS TACTICS MORE SKILLFUL THAN THOSE OF HIS IMMEDIATE PREDECESSOR, GENERAL ARANA. HE REMAINS MORE ACCESSIBLE AND MORE COURTEOUS TO THE OPPOSITION THAN WAS ARANA; LAUGERUD AIMS AT CONTROL THROUGH CO-OPTION AND GENEROUS USE OF GOVERNMENT FUNDS, RATHER THAN THROUGH ARANA'S PREFERRED TACTIC OF PHYSICAL TERROR. LAUGERUD ALSO ADOPTS A STRIKINGLY MORE PROGRESSIVE TONE IN HIS SPEECHES THAN DID HIS PREDECESSOR. ALTHOUGH HE MAY BE BETTER INTENTIONED THAN ARANA, HIS VISION OF WHAT IS PRACTICALLY POSSIBLE IS LITTLE, IF CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 GUATEM 05437 01 OF 02 022358Z

ANY, GREATER. DECISIVE IN DEALING WITH THE EXTREME LEFT WHICH HE FEARS, AND CIVILIAN POLITICIANS, WHOM HE HOLDS IN CONTEMPT, HE IS INDECISIVE IN DEALING WITH THE POWERFUL COMMERCIAL AND LANDOWNING GROUPS WHOSE INTERESTS HIS PROCLAIMED GOALS WOULD THREATEN.

3. IN HIS STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS JULY 1 (GUATEMALA 4802), LAUGERUD THREE TIMES USED THE PHRASE "AGRARIAN REFORM." EVEN TO PRONOUNCE THE WORDS TOOK A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF COURAGE: THE AGRARIAN REFORM INSTITUTED BY THE AREVALO AND ARBENZ GOVERNMENTS OF THE FIFTIES IS STILL REGARDED HERE AS THE PRIME EXAMPLE OF THEIR COMMUNIST ORIENTATION. THERE IS A GOVERNMENT INSTITUTE OF "AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION"

(INTA), NOT OF REFORM. BUT LAUGERUD'S CLAIM THAT INTA'S POLICY OF COLONIZATION OF LANDLESS PEASANTS ON NEW LANDS CONSTITUTES "AN AGRARIAN REFORM, PROGRESSIVE AND STABLE, SLOW BUT NOT BLOODY" REPRESENTS ONLY WISHFUL THINKING IN LIGHT OF PERFORMANCE TO DATE. 1974-79 DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR FIRST TIME MENTIONED NEED FOR "AGRARIAN RESTRUCTURING" AND NOTED NEED FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES AND NEW LEGISLATION, ALMOST NONE OF WHICH HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS CHARGED IN REPORT PUBLISHED JULY 27 THAT "LEGISLATION NOW IN FORCE APPEARS DESIGNED ON PURPOSE TO DEFEND ABOVE ALL THE UNTOUCHABILITY OF PRIVATE PROPERTY, CLOSING ALL THE DOORS TO A POSSIBLE BETTER DISTRIBUTION OF LAND...LARGE LANDHOLDERS WANT TO POSSESS STILL MORE AND THEY HELP THEMSELVES TO LANDS LEGITIMATELY ACQUIRED BY THOSE WHO HAVE WORKED THEM FOR MANY YEARS."

4. SIMILARLY, LAUGERUD'S RECENT DEFENSE OF RURAL COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT, WHICH WAS ALSO MAJOR FEATURE OF HIS 1975 ANNUAL REPORT, DEMONSTRATED COMMENDABLE COURAGE IN FACE OF RIGHTIST OPPOSITION; AND IN FACT COOPERATIVE LEADERS HAVE GREATLY IMPROVED ACCESS TO PRESIDENT AND HIS TOP ADVISERS, AND SUBSTANTIALLY GREATER RESOURCES HAVE BEEN CHANNELLED TO COOPERATIVES. MAJOR COOPERATIVE FEDERATIONS HAVE GROWN IN RESPONSE TO THIS ATTENTION BUT STILL INCLUDE ONLY A FRACTION OF THE RURAL POPULATION. ABOVE ALL, THE ABILITY OF THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT TO SURVIVE BEYOND THE END OF LAUGERUD'S TERM WILL BE HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON ATTITUDE OF HIS SUCCESSOR. GUATEMALA IS LONG WAY AWAY FROM A UNITED SELF-SUSTAINING, TRULY INDEPENDENT COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT.

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 GUATEM 05437 01 OF 02 022358Z

5. THE SAME MAY BE SAID OF LAUGERUD'S POST-EARTHQUAKE RECONSTRUCTION POLICIES. HE SAID JULY 1 THAT HE VIEWED RECONSTRUCTION AS OPPORTUNITY NOT JUST TO REBUILD WHAT HAD PREVIOUSLY EXISTED, BUT "TO REFORM AND TRANSFORM THE CONDITIONS OF LIFE OF THE PEOPLE...THE DECISION TO REFORM VIA RECONSTRUCTION IS CONSISTENT WITH THE PRINCIPLES I HAVE ENUNCIATED SINCE BEFORE ASSUMING THE PRESIDENCY: THAT THE EXPLOSIVE VACUUM THAT SEPARATES AND DIVIDES THOSE WHO HAVE ALL THE WORLDLY GOODS AND THOSE WHO HAVE NONE SHOULD BE ELIMINATED OR AT LEAST DIMINISHED." SIMILAR LANGUAGE HAS BEEN REPEATEDLY USED BY LAUGERUD'S RECONSTRUCTION DIRECTOR, GENERAL PERALTA. WE DO NOT QUESTION LAUGERUD'S OR PERALTA'S GOOD INTENTIONS. BUT GIVEN AVAILABLE RESOURCES AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, GOV ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY, IT IS CLEAR THAT IN ITS REMAINING TWO YEARS THE LAUGERUD ADMINISTRATION WILL BE LUCKY TO ACCOMPLISH PARTIAL RECONSTRUCTION, LET ALONE ANY SIGNIFICANT REFORM IN PRE-EARTHQUAKE CONDITIONS.

6. INDEED, LAUGERUD SEEMS TO BE FULLY AWARE OF THIS, FOR HE GOES ON IN THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS TO SAY

THAT TWO THINGS ARE NEEDED FROM THE PUBLIC IN ORDER FOR RECONSTRUCTION TO GO FORWARD AS IT SHOULD: FIRST, RECOGNITION "THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT A GREAT FATHER THAT HANDS OUT MONEY, GOODS AND WELL-BEING TO ITS CHILDREN," AND SECOND, "TO KNOW HOW TO WAIT, "BECAUSE NOT EVERYTHING CAN BE DONE AT ONCE.

7. MUCH OF WHAT IS BEING DONE IN THE WAY OF RECONSTRUCTION IS BEING FINANCED AND OFTEN EXECUTED AS WELL BE FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS AND PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS. THE ANTICIPATED 1976 BUDGET DEFICIT OF \$345 MILLION WILL BE FINANCED PRIMARILY THROUGH \$142 MILLION OF FOREIGN AID AND A \$122 MILLION BOND SALE - AND SOME OF THE LATTER MAY BE PLACED ABROAD. MUCH FOREIGN ASSISTANCE DOES NOT APEAR IN THE GOVERNMENT BUDGET, OF COURSE. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE ON THIS SCALE WILL BE AVAILABLE IN FUTURE YEARS, WHICH MEANS THAT RECONSTRUCTION, SLOW THOUGH IT HAS BEEN, MUST GO EVEN SLOWER NEXT YEAR.
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 05 GUATEM 05437 01 OF 02 022358Z

8. THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM IS AN OLD ONE IN GUATEMALA: UNWILLINGNESS TO TAX. IDB DATA RANK GUATEMALA 20TH OUT OF 21 LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES IN 1972 AND 1973 IN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT TAX REVENUES AS A PER CENT OF GDP. THE COMPULSORY PURCHASE OF RECONSTRUCTION BONDS WILL, AS REPORTED IN GUATEMALA A-77, ABOUT DOUBLE THE TAX INTAKE FROM THE UPPER INCOME BRACKETS - ON A ONE-TIME BASIS. LAUGERUD ADMINISTRATION MADE SMALL ADJUSTMENTS IN THE TAX STRUCTURE IN ITS FIRST MONTHS IN OFFICE AN IT IS UNLIKELY IT WILL MAKE ANY FURTHER ATTEMPT, EXCEPT FOR TEMPORARY MEASURES SUCH AS THE BOND ISSUE, SPECIFICALLY TIED TO THE RECONSTRUCTION EMERGENCY.

9. PRESSURES TO TAX IN ORDER TO FINANCE EXISTING LOW LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES ARE NONN-EXISTENT. INDUSTRIAL AND AGRICULTURAL BASE OF THE ECONOMY SURVIVED THE FEBRUARY EARTHQUAKE PRACTICALLY UNSCATHED. WORLD MARKET PRICES FOR COFFEE AND COTTON, AND THEREFORE GUATEMALAN EXPORT TAX REVENUES ARE HIGH. GOG HAS GREAT EXPECTATIONS OF NEW REVENUE IN THE FUTURE FROM OIL EXPLORATION AND EXPLOITATION. FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES WERE AT RECORD HIGH OF \$488 MILLION AT THE END OF JUNE AND ARE NOT LIKELY TO DIMINISH BY END OF YEAR TO LESS THAN THE \$304 MILLION HELD AT BEGINNING OF 1976 DESPITE SHARP INCREASES IN IMPORTS OF CONTRUCTION MATERIALS. ECONOMY IS CAPABLE OF RECORD 10 PERCENT REAL GROWTH IN 1976 AND INDEED
ZG IS COUNTIFDBHVUAYP#
VATE ENTERPRISE TO HANDLE LION'S
SHARE OF RECONSTRUCTION. PRIVATE ENTERPRISE HAS BEEN THE MOTOR FOR STEADY AND IMPRESSIVE GROWTH OVER PAST TWO DECADES AND GOG IS NOT ABOUT TO FIDDLE WITH THE MOTOR IN ORDER TO BRING ABOUT A MORE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH AND SOCIAL BENEFITS. SINCE ANYTHING LAUGERUD OR PERALTA MIGHT PROPOSE IN THE WAY

OF REFORM WILL BE IMMEDIATELY ATTACKED AS DAMAGING TO PRIVATE
ENTERPRISE AND THEREFORE TO ECONOMIC GROWTH, THEY
ARE REDUCED TO LITTLE MORE THAN RHETORIC.

NOTE BY OCT: #TEXT AS RECEIVED.

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PAGE 01 GUATEM 05437 02 OF 02 022340Z

54

ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2592

ZEN AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

ZEN AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

ZEN AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

ZEN AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

ZEN USCINCSO FOR POLAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L GSECTION 2 OF 2 GUATEMALA 5437

BUT AS ALREADY NOTED, ALL OF THIS ADDITIONAL INCOME
WILL GO TO REPAIRING EARTHQUAKE DAMAGE AND NOT TO
EXPANSION OF EDUCATION, HEALTH, AGRICULTURAL CREDIT,
OR OTHER SOCIAL PROGRAMS.

10. IF IN THE ECONOMIC AREA WE MAY SAY THAT LAUGERUD WOULD
LIKE TO DO MORE BUT FEELS CONSTRAINED BY POLITICAL REALITY,
IN THE POLITICAL AREA WE WOULD HAVE TO SAY THAT LAUGERUD HAS DONE
LITTLE TO ALTER REALITY. DURING THE LAST YEAR THERE WAS A
GROWING BELIEF AMONG GUATEMALAN POLITICAL LEADERS THAT LAUGERUD
WAS FEELING HIS WAY (AS THROUGH A MINEFIELD) TOWARD A NEW CENTRIST
COALITION, BUILT AROUND THE PID AND THE PR, EXCLUDING THE RIGHTIST
MLN WHICH AFTER JUNE 1975 WAS ALMOST AN OPPOSITION PARTY, AND
PERHAPS EVEN GOING SO FAR AS TO INCLUDE THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS
(DCG), THE PARTY WHOSE ELECTION VICTORY IN 1974 WAS SO INTOLERABLE
TO THE ARANA ADMINISTRATION AND THE MILITARY THAT FRAUDULENT
RETURNS WERE DEvised TO PUT LAUGERUD IN OFFICE.

BEFORE THE EARTHQUAKE, THE EMBASSY FOUND IT HARD TO
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PAGE 02 GUATEM 05437 02 OF 02 022340Z

BELIEVE THAT LAUGERUD AND THE DCG COULD EVER FIND COMMON GROUND. POST-QUAKE, LAUGERUD'S APPOINTMENT OF GENERAL PERALTA - THE DCG'S FIRST CHOICE CANDIDATE FOR 1978 - TO THE PRESTIGIOUS POST OF RECONSTRUCTION DIRECTOR, AND WHAT WE ASSUMED TO BE LAUGERUD'S OWN GREATER PRESTIGE AND INFLUENCE AS A RESULT OF THE LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION DISPLAYED IN THE RELIEF EFFORT, SEEMED TO OPEN UP NEW POSSIBILITIES. THE PRESIDENT'S MOST LOYAL SUPPORTERS, THE PID, FORMED A COALITION WITH PR AND THE DCG FOR THE JUNE CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE ELECTIONS, AND DCG LEADERS TALKED FREELY ABOUT THEIR INTEREST IN MOVING BEYOND THAT LIMITED ALLIANCE TO LONGER-RANGE COOPERATION.

11. IT IS NOW CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT THE DCG'S INTEREST IN JOINING A PRO-GOVERNMENT COALITION WAS GREATER THAN THE GOVERNMENT'S, AND THAT DCG LEADER DE LEON'S REMARKABLY ILL-TIMED DECISION TO CRITICIZE THE GOG FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BEFORE A US CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE A WEEK BEFORE THE GUATEMALAN CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS WAS THE LAST STRAW FOR LAUGERUD. HE ORDERED THE PR TO VOTE FOR A PR-MLN SLATE OF OFFICERS, FREEZING OUT THE CDGM. THE PID HAS SINCE HUMBLY SOUGHT AND BEEN GRANTED READMITTANCE TO THE FOLD, AND THE PROSPECT FOR 1978 IS THE OLD RIGHT-WING MLN-PID ALLIANCE, JOINED BY WHATEVER REMNANT OF PR MAY THEN EXIST, IN SUPPORT OF AN ARMY GENERAL OF LAUGERUD'S CHOICE (SEE GUATEMALA A-82 FOR A REVIEW OF POSSIBLE CANDIDATES).

12. SOME FOREIGN JOURNALISTS HAVE READ INTO THIS SERIES OF EVENTS A REASSERTION OF POWER BY FORMER PRESIDENT ARANA, OR PERHAPS MERELY A REVELATION THAT HE HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE MOST POWERFUL FIGURES IN GUATEMALAN POLITICS. EXHIBIT A FOR THIS THEORY WAS THE ELECTION OF ARANISTA LUIS ALFONSO LOPEZ AS PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS. IN FACT, HOWEVER, LAUGERUD'S CHOICE OF LOPEZ WAS CALCULATED TO GIVE HIM THE LEAST DIFFICULTY FROM THE RIVAL PRO-GOVERNMENT FACTIONS. HE DID NOT WANT A MLN MAN WHOSE PRIMARY LOYALTY WOULD HAVE BEEN TO VICE PRESIDENT MARIO SANDOVAL, A MAN LAUGERUD FEARS AND DISTRUSTS FAR MORE THAN HE DOES ARANA. LAUGERUD COULD NOT HAVE A PID CANDIDATE BECAUSE OF ITS COMMITMENT TO THE DCG. HE REJECTED RAMIRO PONCE MONROY, THE ORIGINAL ARANISTA CANDIDATE, WHO WOULD HAVE BEEN A MUCH MORE FORCEFUL ADVOCATE OF PONCE'S OWN AND PERHAPS ARANA'S POLITICAL INTERESTS. LOPEZ WAS ONE OF THE FEW INOFFENSIVE BUT FEASIBLE POSSIBILITIES LEFT.

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 GUATEM 05437 02 OF 02 022340Z

13. THE EVIDENCE DOES SUGGEST THAT THE LAST FIVE MONTHS HAVE BEEN A MUCH MORE UNSETTLED PERIOD BEHIND THE SCENES THAN WE HAD THOUGHT, A PERIOD IN WHICH LAUGERUD HAS HAD TO MANEUVER TO ASSERT HIS AUTHORITY RATHER THAN EFFORTLESSLY ENJOYING THE PRESTIGE EARNED WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC AS A RESULT OF THE RELIEF EFFORT. ARANA MAY - ALTHOUGH OUR INFORMATION IS VERY SCANTY - HAVE APPLIED QUIET PRESSURE IN FAVOR OF A

GREATER ROLE FOR OLD ALLIES OF HIS, SUCH AS PRESS SECRETARY GIRON AND FINANCE MINISTEC LAMPORT, AGAINST ANY DALLYING WITH THE DCG, AND IN FAVOR OF HARSHER TACTICS AGAINST LEFT-WING TERRORISTS. BUT ARANA HAS ALWAYS BEEN A MEMBER OF THE MILITARY INNER CIRCLE; IT WAS HE WHO CHOSE LAUGERUD AS A CANDIDATE AND WHO SAW TO IT THAT LAUGERUD WAS ABLE TO TAKE OFFICE; ARANA'S ADVICE WILL NATURALLY BE LISTENED TO BY LAUGERUD. BUT WE SEE NO INDICATION THAT LAUGERUD IS DOMINATED BY ARANA OR THAT THE MAJOR LINES OF GOVERNMENT POLICY ARE NOT LAUGERUD'S OWN. HE HAS HAD TO MAKE SOME CONCESSIONS IN SOME AREAS TO THE EXTREME RIGHT, BECAUSE THIS IS A COUNTRY IN WHICH THE EXTREME RIGHT IS VERY POWERFUL.

14. A WORD ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS. SHORT OF DIRECT AND PERSONAL CRITICISM OF THE PRESIDENT, THE PRESS AND THE ONE LEGAL, INDEPENDENT OPPOSITION PARTY ARE FREE TO COMMENT AND CRITICIZE GOVERNMENT POLITICS AND ACTIONS AND DO SO WITH FREQUENCY. SOME INTIMIDATION OF OPPOSITION LEADERS AND EVEN REFORM-MINDED GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS DOES TAKE PLACE THROUGH THREATS, BOMB EXPLOSIONS, OCCASIONAL ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION. IN THE INTERIOR, AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, KIDNAPPINGS, OFTEN FOLLOWED BY TORTURE AND ASSASSINATION, ARE STILL ALL TOO COMMON. HOWEVER, THE FREQUENCY OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE, AT ALL LEVELS, IS WELL BELOW THE HEIGHTS REACHED UNDER ARANA (SEE GUATEMALA A-94 AND 86 FOR DETAILED DISCUSSION). CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT LEADER RENE DE LEON HAS SAID THE MAJOR DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE ARANA AND LAUGERUD GOVERNMENTS IS THAT THE LATTER DOES NOT ENCOURAGE OR CONDONE THE USE OF VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM BY EXTRA-OFFICIAL RIGHT-WING GROUPS. LAUGERUD HAS, IN FACT, IN OUR JUDGMENT, DONE A GREAT DEAL TO STOP RIGHT-WING VIOLENCE, AT LEAST AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL. BUT LAUGERUD HAS DEMONSTRATED THROUGHOUT THE LAST TWO YEARS THAT HE DOES NOT BELIEVE IN DEALING WITH TERRORISTS AND GUERRILLAS, RIGHT OR LEFT, THROUGH THE COURTS. ALWAYS BITTER ENEMIES OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 GUATEM 05437 02 OF 02 022340Z

(PGT) AND ITS ARMED GROUPS, LAUGERUD AND HIS ADVISERS ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED BY THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW ORGANIZATION ON THE EXTREME LEFT, THE EGP, WHICH SINCE LAST DECEMBER HAS DEMONSTRATED AN ABILITY TO CARRY OFF A SERIES OF TERRORIST ACTS (MURDER, ARSON, AND ROBBERY) WITH IMPUNITY. IN ATTEMPTING TO DEAL WITH THIS THREAT, GOG HAS USED TORTURE, PROLONGED ILLEGAL DETENTION, AND SUMMARY ILLEGAL EXECUTIONS TO DISPOSE OF PERSONS CAUGHT WITH HARD EVIDENCE OF PARTICIPATION IN TERRORIST OR GUERRILLA ACTIVITY OR EVEN, AT TIMES, SIMPLY IN DISTRIBUTION OF PROPAGANDA IN SUPPORT OF SUCH ACTIVITY.

15. VIOLENCE REMAINS THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL POLITICAL PROBLEM OF GUATEMALA, AND THERE IS NO QUESTION BUT THAT ITS ORIGINS LIE IN THE TENSION PRODUCED BY ATTEMPTING TO MAINTAIN A GOVERNMENT THAT NEITHER TAXES NOR SPENDS, AN ELECTORAL SYSTEM WHICH PERMITS DISSENT BUT RARELY REWARDS IT, AND AN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SYSTEM DESIGNED TO PRESERVE THE COMFORT AND EASE OF A TINAY MAJORITY.

THE BISHOPS MAY BE WRONG IN SAYING THAT GUATEMALA "HAS ENTERED INTO THE TERRIBLE 'SPIRAL OF VIOLENCE': SUBVERSION RESPONDS TO OPPRESSION, REPRESSEION TO SUBVERSION, AND THUS, LITTLE BY LITTLE THE CLIMATE BECOMES MORE DESPERATE". GUATEMALANS HAVE FOR MANY YEARS BEEN APATHETIC ABOUT VIOLENCE, INFLATION, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND, MORE RECENTLY, ABOUT THE SLOW PROGRESS OF RECONSTRUCTION IN URBAN AREAS. WE THINK IT MORE LIKELY THAT GUATEMALA WILL LIMP ALONG , SWALLOWING ITS DAILY QUOTA OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL VIOLENCE, AND THAT LAUGERUD WILL TURN HIS COUNTRY OVER TO HIS CHOSEN SUCCESSOR LITTLE BETTER OR WORSE THAN HE FOUND IT.
ANDREWS

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TAGS: PGOV, PINS, PINT, GT, (LAUGERUD GARCIA, KJELL)
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